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College Students' Preference and Purchase Intention of Online Customized Sports Shoes

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Keywords: Mass Customization; College Students; Theory of Reasoned Action; Sports Shoes

Mass customization, has been considered as a trend to increase brand value and market share. Since the first offer of customized product in the sportswear industry was launched in the late 1990s (Boër & Dulio, 2007), it has been developing at a high speed and nowadays top sportswear brands have their mass customization programs such as Nike iD, mi-Adidas and Reebok Custom. Boër and Dulio (2007) categorize three types of mass customization as: design, performance, and fit. Shoes, especially sports shoes, are products that require quality, aesthetics, as well as functions. When the top sports brand Adidas first introduced its mass customization program mi-Adidas, in Paris, it provided normal consumers with both custom fit and the selection of styles. However, from the production perspective, a better understanding of consumers' customization preference (i.e. style, performance, or fit) is needed to control inventory and production cost while maximizing added value to customers through specific customization options. College students are important consumers of sports shoes. However, what types of customization are preferred by this group of consumers and what values of customized sports shoes attract them to purchase have not been fully understood. To this end, the purpose of this study is to better understand college students' acceptance of customized sport shoes.

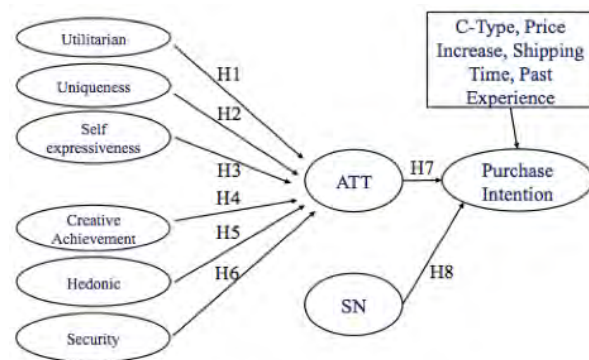


Figure 1. Original Research Model

A research model with hypotheses was developed through integrating the theory of reasoned action and perceived value of mass customization (Figure 1). In addition, customization type, price increase, shipping time allowance (Aichner & Coletti, 2013), and past shopping experience are included as external variables. According to Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), consumers' purchase intention is affected by the attitude toward a given brand/a product and his/her subjective norm. Previous studies revealed two significant benefits of mass customization: value of product, and the value of experience (Aur lie Merle, Chandon, Roux, & Alizon, 2010; Schreier, 2006). Aur lie Merle, Chandon, & Roux (2010) systematically classified the mass customization product value into utilitarian, uniqueness, and self-expressiveness value with experience value furthered classified into creative achievement value, and hedonic value. Moreover, security regarding personal information is also a critical factor to the attitude toward creating customized product through online websites (Cho & Fiorito, 2009).

Empirical data was collected through a paper questionnaire from a southeastern University of America and 184 responses were included for data analyses. Three rounds of exploratory factor analyses were conducted with items having low communalities, low loadings, or high cross loading

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removed respectively. Varimax rotation resulted in six factors with 76.93% of total variances explained and item loadings ranging from .667 to .895. Cronbach's alpha values are all higher than .7. However, value dimensions of creative achievement, uniqueness, and self-expressiveness merge with overall positive attitude toward customized sports shoes. Summits of factor items were used as index variables for identified factors to run path analyses to test hypothesized relationships (see figure 2). MANOVA was used to analyze how customization types, price increases, and shipping time allowance affect participants' purchase intention.

Proposed hypotheses were partially supported. Positive attitude and social norm both predict purchase intention. Uniqueness, utilitarian, and personal information security equally predict individuals' overall attitude. MANOVA tests indicate that purchase intention with 10% of price increase and 15% extra shipping time is higher than those with other options of price or shipping time increases. Interestingly, preference of customization types does not affect purchase intention. Results indicate marketers need to create and communicate value with focuses on uniqueness in product and customer experiences, as well as product performance and fit. However, marketers may be able to deliver added value with less style customization options (such as colors) to reduce inventory cost because consumers only value uniqueness. In addition, responses to open-end questions showed the most critical concern is the "return policy", indicating friendly return policy may increase sales. Moreover, consumers' past experience of whether they have purchased the customized sports shoes doesn't significantly affect their attitude toward MC, indicating companies can target at all consumers without concerning about their past mass customization experience. Future research may need to use experiment to further test this group of customers' customization preferences.

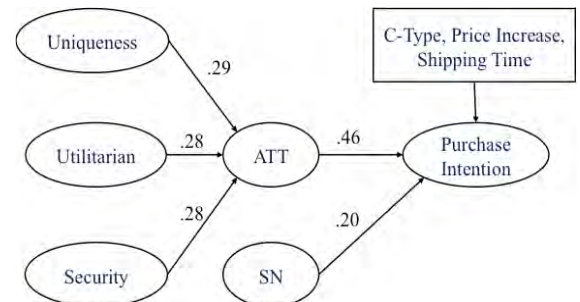


Figure 2. Revised Research Model

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